

MURPHY IRON WORKS, OFFICE BUILDING
(Riley Stoker Company, Office Building)
101 Walker Street
Wayne County
Michigan

HABS No. MI-319

HABS
MICH,
82 DETRO.
50-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MURPHY IRON WORKS, OFFICE BUILDING
(RILEY STOKER COMPANY, OFFICE BUILDING)

HABS No. MI-319

Location: 101 Walker Street, Detroit, Wayne County,
Michigan. The property is on the Detroit
River, at the foot of Walker Street

USGS Detroit Quadrangle, Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
17.334110.4688950

Present Owner: MichCon Development Corporation
500 Griswold
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Present
Occupant: Vacant

Significance: The Murphy Iron Works office building,
built in 1914, is an excellent example
of a high-quality general business office
built for a medium-sized, prosperous
Detroit metal-working firm of the early
twentieth century. It was designed by
George V. Pottle, a successful, but not
renown Detroit architect who worked
during the era of Detroit's most rapid
growth. The Murphy Iron Works was a
significant labor battleground in 1907
and in many respects, was the birthplace
of Detroit's Open Shop Movement in the
early twentieth century. The building
reflects the prosperity which this firm
and its owners enjoyed in part because of
their successful struggle against
organized labor.

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PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1914. Building Permit # 2399, issued 25 May 1914. (Source: City of Detroit Building Permits, Department of Building and Safety Engineering, City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan.)
2. Architect: George Valentine Pottle, born on 23 March 1875 in Dayton, Ohio. He studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and worked as a draftsman in architects' offices in Ohio, Virginia, and Massachusetts from 1893 until 1901, when he moved to Detroit. Pottle established his own practice in Detroit in 1905 and went on to design numerous middle class residences and a few modest commercial buildings before his death in 1936. Like dozens of other architects who worked in Detroit during the city's most rapid growth, from the turn of the century to 1929, Pottle did not produce any noteworthy designs, but nevertheless earned a respectable living. He was important enough to merit a brief entry in Albert N. Marquis, The Book of Detroiters (1914) and a vertical file at the Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library.
3. Original and subsequent owners: References to the Chain of Title to the land upon which the building stands are in the Office of the Register of Deeds of Wayne County, City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan, Tract Index Book No. 523 (no pagination).

Legal Description of property: Lot 55 of Private Claim 11 (Benoit Chapoton Farm)

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1895 | Warranty Deed, recorded 4 June 1895, Hiram Walker to Edward, Franklin, and James Walker |
| 1902 | Warranty Deed, recorded 27 September 1902. Edward, Franklin, and James Walker to the Murphy Company, Ltd |

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3. Original and subsequent owners (continued):

- 1905 Warranty Deed, recorded 27 January 1905, Murphy Company, Ltd. to Murphy Iron Works
- 1912 Mortgage, recorded 30 August 1912, Murphy Iron Works (a Detroit, Michigan corporation) and Peoples State Bank of Detroit
- 1952 Quit Claim Deed, recorded 16 May 1952, Fred H. Daniels (Trustee For Murphy Iron Works) to Riley Stoker Corporation
- 1969 Mortgage, recorded 17 November 1969, Riley Stoker Corporation (a Massachusetts corporation) and State Street Bank and Trust Company of Boston, Massachusetts
- 1979 Warranty Deed, recorded 29 December 1979, Riley Stoker Corporation to Robert F. Byrne
- 1981 Warranty Deed, recorded 13 January 1981, Robert F. and Margaret O. Byrne to Ralph Vigliotti Realty Company
- 1982 Warranty Deed, recorded 23 March 1982, Ralph Vigliotti to American Natural Resources Company
- 1982 Warranty Deed, recorded 1 April 1982, American Natural Resources Company to American Natural Resources Company (2/3rds) and Michigan Consolidated Gas Company (1/3rd), as tenants in common
- 1984 Quit Claim Deed, recorded 5 July 1984, American Natural Resources Company and Michigan Consolidated Gas Company to ANR Development Corporation and MichCon Development Corporation, as tenants in common

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: not known.

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5. Original plans and construction: Only two sheets of the original architectural drawings are extant following a major roof leak in the mid-1960s. One sheet includes the east and west elevations for the "Office Building for the Murphy Iron Works at the Foot of Walker Street," and is labelled, "George V. Pottle, Architect, Studio - 708 Gaa Company Building, Detroit, Mich." The second sheet is a plan of the attic and roof. The drawings, although not dated, were almost certainly prepared in 1913 or 1914. They are in the offices of the MichCon Development Corporation. A thorough search of local and state archives has uncovered no other architectural drawings or historic photographs of the Murphy Iron Works Office.
6. Alterations and Additions: The only significant alteration to the exterior was the replacement of the original tile roof with asphalt shingles sometime around 1965, following major leakage. A women's restroom was installed on the first floor sometime in the early 1970s. Drop ceilings were installed in some of the individual offices in the early 1970s as well, but the original pressed tin ceilings were not disturbed.

B. History of Murphy Iron Works

Thomas Murphy was born in Ireland in 1835, moved to the United States in 1840, and by the early 1850s worked in Cleveland as an assistant engineer on a lake tugboat. Thomas Murphy initially appeared in the Detroit City Directory of 1880 as a "founder and machinist." His specialty, however, was the manufacture of "Murphy's patented grate bars, smokeless furnaces, and feed water heaters." In the period 1875-1882, Murphy had developed and patented several furnaces, which could burn "slack coal," previously thrown away. Sales of Murphy's furnaces developed swiftly among steel, electrical power, and street railway companies. By 1890, Murphy Iron Works employed forty-six men, primarily molders and machinists, to make Murphy's stokers and furnaces.

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The firm's first Detroit manufacturing plant, located at Third and Congress quickly became too small and in 1892, Murphy acquired the property of the Russel Wheel and Foundry Works at Walker Street and the Detroit River, about one and one-half miles east of downtown Detroit. The Russel Wheel and Foundry Company, manufacturers of railroad car wheels and other castings, built a substantial plant there in 1880, but by the early 1890s, needed an even larger site. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Murphy Iron Works had about one hundred employees at its riverfront manufacturing complex. These were primarily molders and other foundry workers, but included machinists and other skilled metal workers. Notable Murphy Iron Works employees during this era included the machinists John and Horace Dodge, the future auto industry pioneers, who worked for Murphy from 1886 until 1894.

Thomas Murphy died in Phoenix, Arizona, on May 23, 1904, but was buried in Detroit. Some of Murphy's Cleveland employees came to Detroit to serve as the pallbearers at his funeral. During the eulogy at the funeral service, Deacon F.D. Taylor of the Fort Street Congregational Church recalled Thomas Murphy as a "Christian Citizen." Murphy died without a will--and without a son to continue his business (he had one daughter and two step-daughters). His nephew, Chester Murphy Culver, became administrator of the Murphy estate and general manager of the Murphy Iron Works from 1904 to 1909. Culver, a native of Pontiac, Illinois, graduated from Harvard Law School in 1899, and then moved to Detroit.

Sales, output, and employment levels increased at the Murphy Iron Works in the period when Culver ran the firm, but so did conflicts with organized labor. In 1907 a strike ensued after the company rejected a demand by its iron molders for a reduction of the work day from 10 to 9 hours and wage increase. Soon the conflict escalated into a major confrontation around the company's property between police and hundreds of supporters of the strike. With the help of the Employers' Association of Detroit, the company obtained strikebreakers and secured an injunction against the strikers. Not coincidentally, Thomas Murphy had helped establish the Employers' Association of Detroit in late 1902, and Chester Culver served as general manager of that organization from 1916 to 1953.

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The strike quickly ended with a clear victory for the company, including the destruction of the molders' union. From a more general point of view, the company's success in the 1907 strike was part of a string of anti-union victories in Detroit in the early twentieth century which made the city an outstanding example of the Open Shop system of labor relations until the rise of the UAW and other unions in the late-1930s.

The management of the Murphy Iron Works followed up its decisive strike victory by instituting changes in foundry operations which the Iron Molders' Union had long opposed, such as the widespread introduction of molding machinery. As a result of such changes the company's output increased significantly. According to a report by John Whirl, the secretary of the Employers' Association of Detroit, output increased by fifty per cent immediately after the strike, while the labor force fell by one-third.

As a reflection of the prosperity and growth enjoyed by the firm after the 1907 strike, the Murphy Iron Works expanded its Walker Street plant considerably. This office building, completed in 1914, reflected the firm's success. The company built a large steel-framed foundry in 1910 and later expansion included pattern shops, a powerhouse, and warehouses, all completed in 1918-1919. Employment levels fluctuated throughout the 1920s. According to statistics recorded in the Employers' Association of Detroit's "Labor Barometer," 415 workers were employed by the company on October 19, 1920. Due to the economic depression of 1920-1921, employment fell off dramatically over the next year. Employment levels did not fully rebound until the middle of 1923, when a peak of 419 employees worked there.

Throughout the 1920s, the Murphy Iron Works/Riley Stoker Company remained a mid-sized manufacturing firm. The Riley Stoker Company of Worcester, Massachusetts leased the plant beginning in March, 1925, but did not buy it outright until 1952. Employment through 1928 fluctuated between roughly 250 and 350 men. In April 1932, the Walker Street plant of the Riley Stoker Company still had 201 employees.

The Great Lakes Beverage Company, a beer and soft drink distributor, leased the office building and most of the surrounding steel-framed buildings from the late 1960s until 1981. The buildings have remained vacant since then.

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statamant:

1. Architectural Character: This is a rectangular, symmetrical, brown-colored brick building which displays some of the characteristics of Prairie Style architecture that flourished in the midwestern United States between 1900 and 1920. The low-pitched hipped roof with overhanging unbracketed eaves, the single-story porch with massive square porch supports, and the emphasis on horizontality in the facade detailing, all identifying features of the Prairie Style, are evident in this building. The architect has created a design which mixes residential scale and detailing with the obvious business functions of the building.
2. Condition of fabric: Exterior walls, windows, and roof are in good condition, as are most of the interior spaces. In the past two years, vandals have removed door knobs and portions of stairway railings.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: This two and one-half story rectangular building is 72' X 42' in plan.
2. Foundations: Exterior brick bearing walls extend three feet below grade. There is no basement, only a crawl space.
3. Walls: Exterior walls are of dark brown common brick. The stylized brick contributes to the horizontal linear appearance of the structure. The rusticated brickwork on the first story continues around the building, while on the second story, a stringcourse of raised brick weaves between and around the top of the windows. A narrow course of white stone formally demarcates the first and second stories and extends around the entire building. The same stone is used as sills for the first floor windows.

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4. Structural systems, framing: The exterior brick walls are load-bearing. The horizontal floor joists are of timber construction, supported by steel columns.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: One-story porches stand at the east and west ends of the structure. Entry to the east porch, which is centered on the primary facade, is by way of two sets of concrete steps located on the sides of the porch. The porch floor is concrete, while the ceiling and fascia are wood. The porch roof, which is low-pitched and hipped in shape, is covered with rounded, brown-colored clay tiles which converge on a decorative hip knob. The roof is supported by four brick columns, each eighteen inches square, with stone capitals. These in turn rest on a brick and stone base which stands four feet above the ground. A decorative wrought iron railing extends along the front of the porch. The smaller enclosed porch of brick located at the northwest corner of the structure has a shingled hipped roof.
6. Chimneys: A modern steel chimney extends from the enclosed porch at the west end of the building. The building has no original chimney because it was heated with steam from a central boiler which served the entire industrial complex.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The building has two doors, one on the west and east facades. The west facade has a steel door of recent vintage. The door on the east facade is made of wood and glass, and is surrounded by a wooden frame.

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- b. Windows and shutters: Windows are all one-over-one light double-hung wooden sash windows, set in wooden frames. On the first story, small deadlight windows appear over the sash windows. In recent years, many of these have been fitted with air conditioners. In addition to their practical functional purpose, to provide natural light for the building interior, the long series of windows on both stories of the north and south facades emphasize the horizontality of the building. Where windows were not installed, as on the northeastern corner of the building, the architect created bricked-in window spaces to lend continuity to the fenestration. On the north facade, ten identical windows or window spaces appear on each story. The arrangement on the south facade which overlooks the Detroit River is similar except that each story has only seven windows, but these are wider than the ones on the north facade. There is no apparent reason for this variation in the building fenestration. The west facade has three sets of two windows on the second story and one pair on the first. The east facade has two windows on the first story, flanking the porch, and three on the second story.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: the roof is hipped and is covered with asphalt shingles. Originally, it was a hipped roof covered with clay tiles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: the eaves are wide, overhanging, unbracketed, with wooden soffit boards. A tin gutter encircles the roof, linked to a downspout at the center of each facade.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Both the north and south sides of the roof feature a pair of attic-level, wooden, gabled dormers. In addition, a small, shed-style ventilation dormer rests on the north side of the roof between the two gabled dormers.

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C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: The first and second floors have similar plans, with a central corridor extending the length of the building, and individual offices of various sizes double loaded to either side of the corridor. Each office is typically fitted with doors leading to the central corridor and to adjoining offices as well. For first floor, second floor, and attic plans, see sketch plans.
2. Stairways: The building has three sets of stairs. At the west end of the building, a short set of stairs extends from the first floor to the basement crawlspace, while another set runs from the first floor to the second, and has a landing where it reverses direction. The third staircase extends from the second floor to the attic and is located at the east end of the building.
3. Flooring: The original oak floors are largely intact, but are covered with tile squares or carpeting.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The two central corridors feature oak wainscoting, which is found in the private executive offices as well. The remaining walls are plaster, although some areas have floor-to-ceiling paneling installed in the 1960s. The vast majority of the original pressed tin ceilings are intact, although hidden above drop ceilings installed in the early 1970s.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doors and doorways: Interior doors are oak, with frosted glass comprising the upper two-thirds. Doors opening onto the central corridors have transom windows with moveable lights. Closet and storage area door are solid oak.
 - b. Windows: Wide oak window frames are plain in appearance. The large windows on the south and west facades provide good natural lighting.

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6. Decorative features and trim: There are five large built-in cabinets of oak at various locations throughout the building. The cabinet found in the small office at the west end of the second story includes storage space for blueprints, indicating that this was the engineering office.
7. Vaults: There are two large walk-in vaults, one on each floor, located at the northeast corner of the building. The payroll office, with a small pay window accessible from the main corridor, adjoins the first floor vault.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: The original heating system consisted of steam radiators supplied by the central boiler plant. The radiators are not extant. A baseboard hot water heating system, served by a gas furnace at the west end of the building, was installed in the late 1960s.
 - b. Lighting: The overhead fluorescent light fixtures are not original to the building.
 - c. Plumbing and rest rooms: The men's rest room at the east end of the second story, has the original plumbing fixture. A ladies' bathroom on the first floor dates from the 1960s, probably the first such facility for women in the building. Two executive offices on the southwest corner of the building have private washrooms and closets.
 - d. Dumb-waiter: A small, rope-operated dumb waiter, located at the east end of the building, serves the first two floors and the attic.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The structure is located on the west side of Walker Street, just north of the Detroit River. This structure is situated within a complex of much larger brick and steel-framed buildings, as indicated in the general site plan. The topography is flat.

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PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: Only two sheets have survived, one showing the east and west elevations and the other showing a plan of the attic and roof. These are undated, but one identifies George V. Pottle as the architect. The drawings are currently in the offices of the MichCon Development Corporation. An overall site plan, labelled "Layout of the Murphy Ironworks, March 1918," no architect indicated, can be found in the same location.

B. Historic views: none have been located.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Detroit, City of. Building Permits. Department of Building and Safety Engineering, City County Building, Detroit, Michigan.

Murphy, Thomas. Miscellaneous Material, Reading Room File, Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library.

Pottle, George V. Miscellaneous Material, Reading Room File, Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library.

Wayne County, Register of Deeds. Land Tract Index, Book No. 523. City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Burton, Clarence M. The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922. Detroit: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922.

Employers' Association of Detroit. Labor Barometer. Detroit, 19201-1928, passim.

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Eighth Annual Report. Lansing: 1891.

Polk, Ralph L. and Company. Detroit City
Directories. Detroit: Polk & Company, 1879, 1882.

Zunz, Olivier. The Changing Face of Inequality:
Urbanization, Industrial Development, and
Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920. Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1982.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was prepared in July-November, 1988, in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Detroit, the Michigan State Historic Preservation Officer, MichCon Development Corporation, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative measure prior to the demolition of the Murphy Iron Works Office.

Prepared by: Dr. Charles K. Hyde

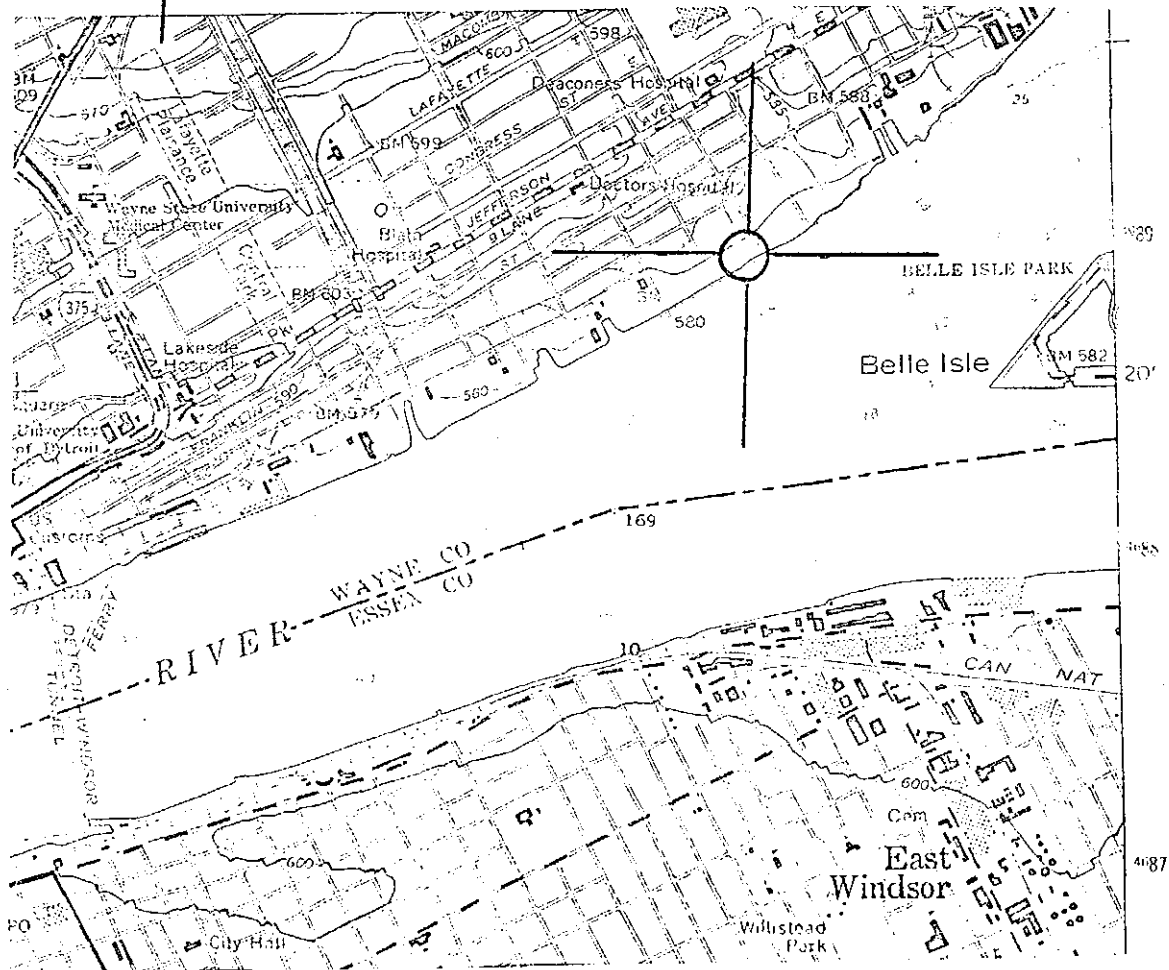
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of History

Affiliation: Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan 48202

Date: 19 November 1988

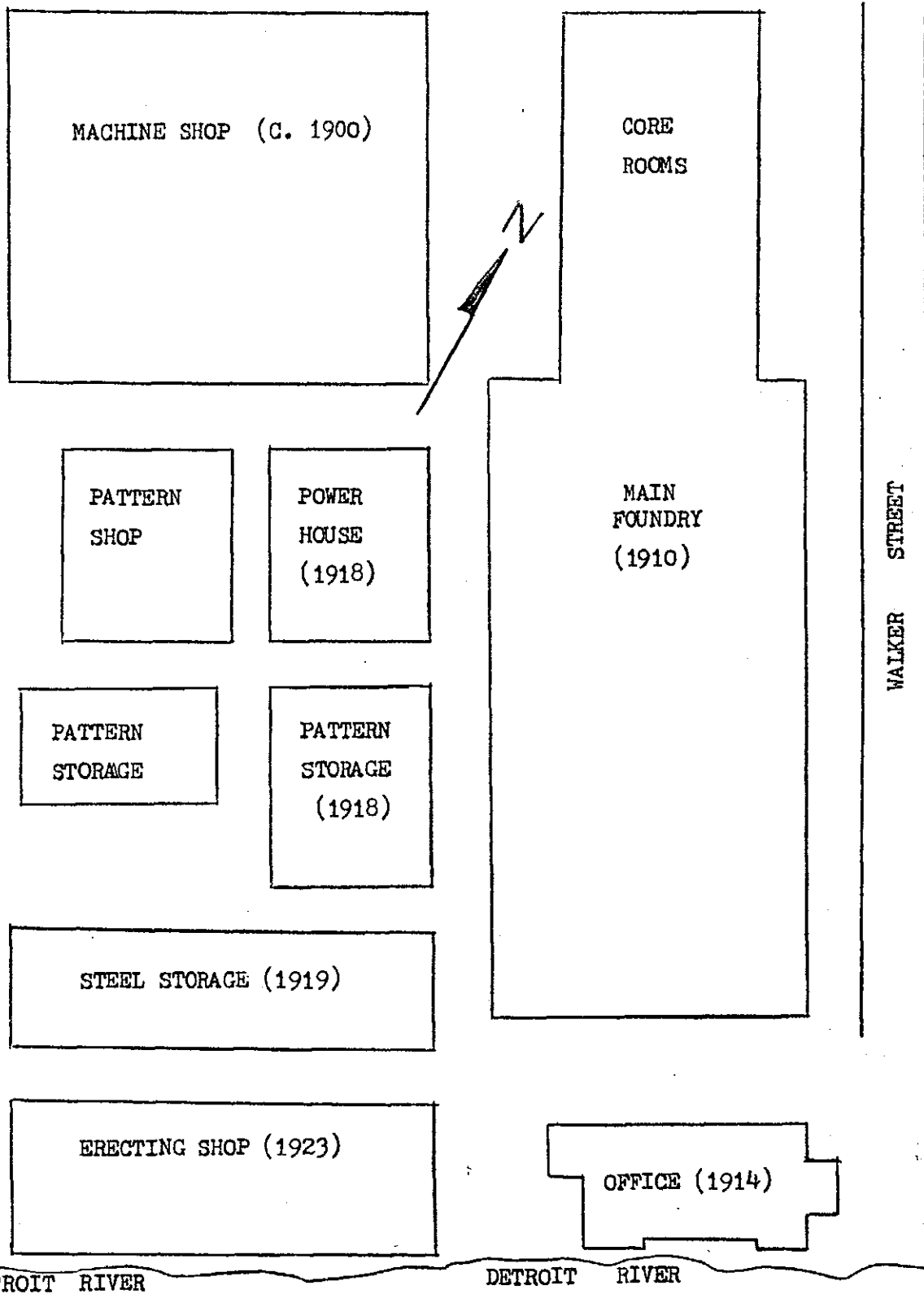
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DETROIT, MICHIGAN, QUADRANGLE
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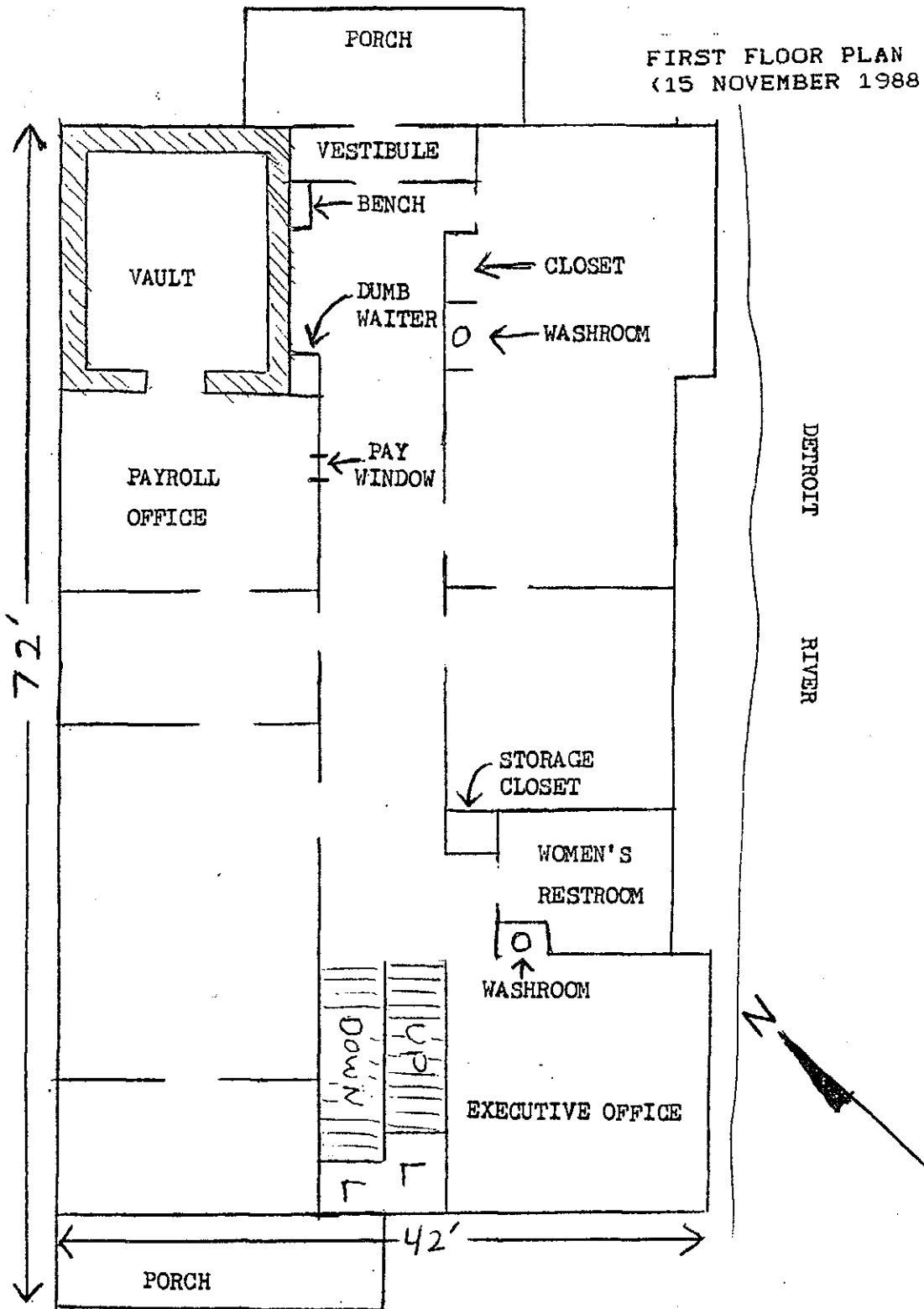
GENERAL SITE PLAN
(15 NOVEMBER 1988)

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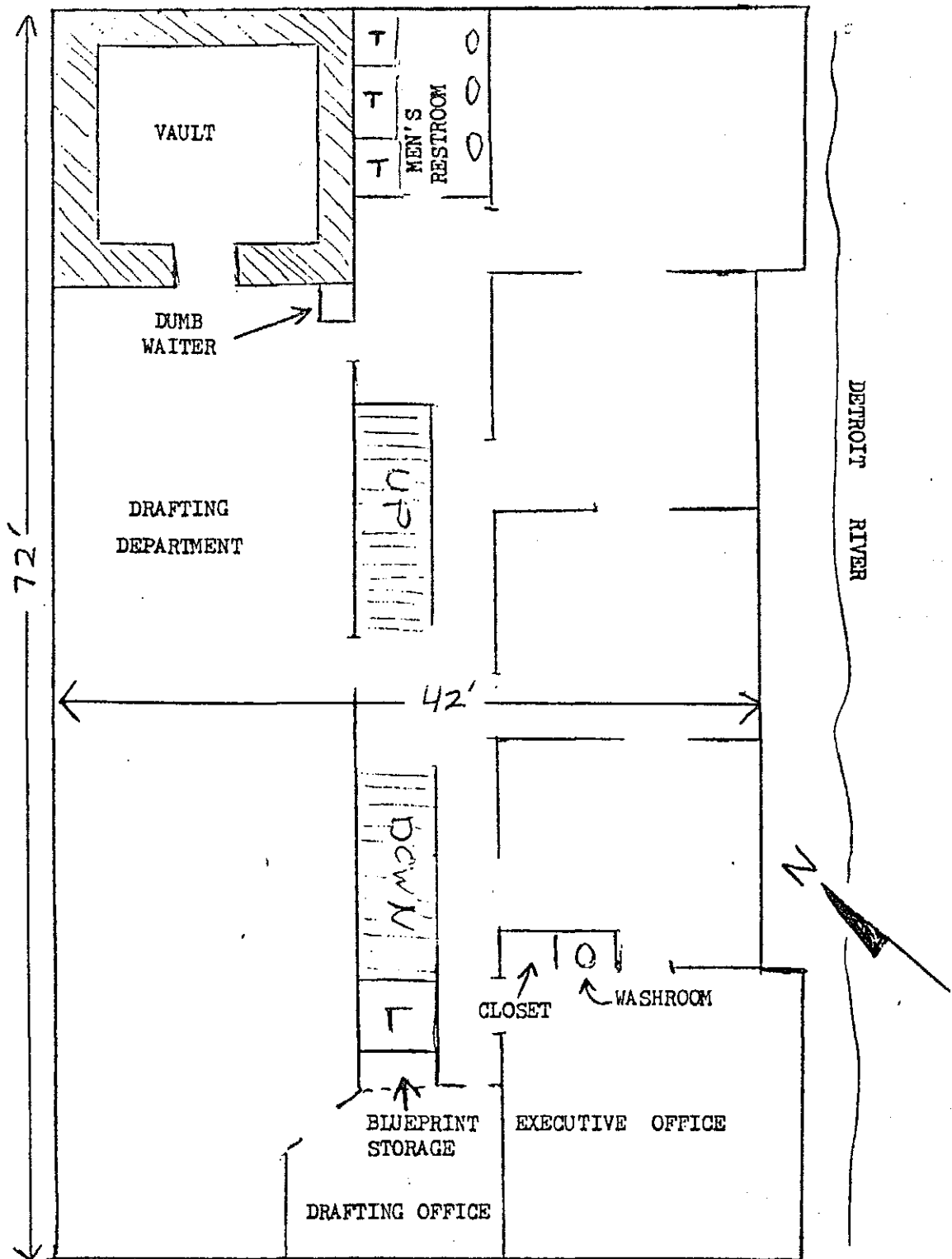
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FIRST FLOOR PLAN
(15 NOVEMBER 1988)



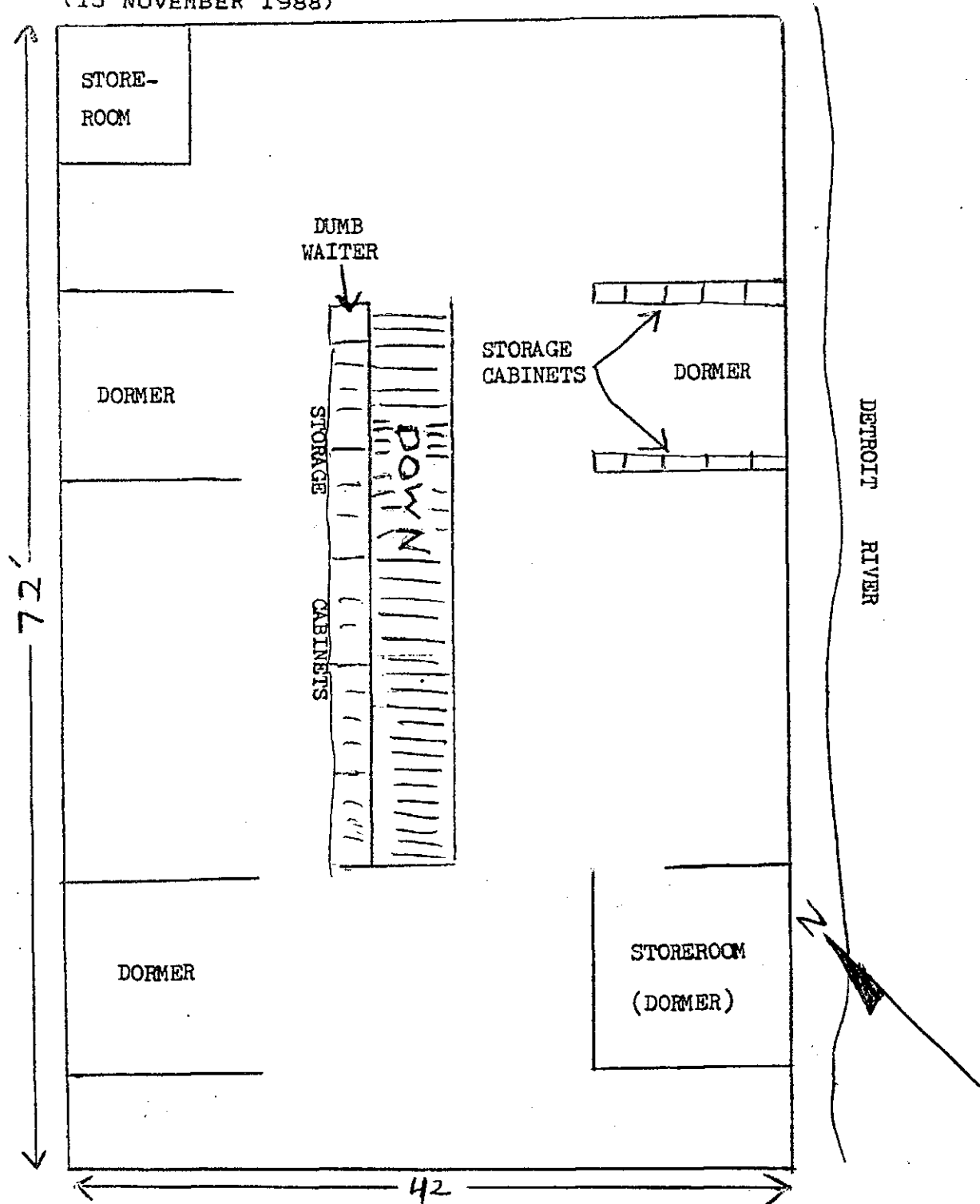
SECOND FLOOR PLAN
(15 NOVEMBER 1988)

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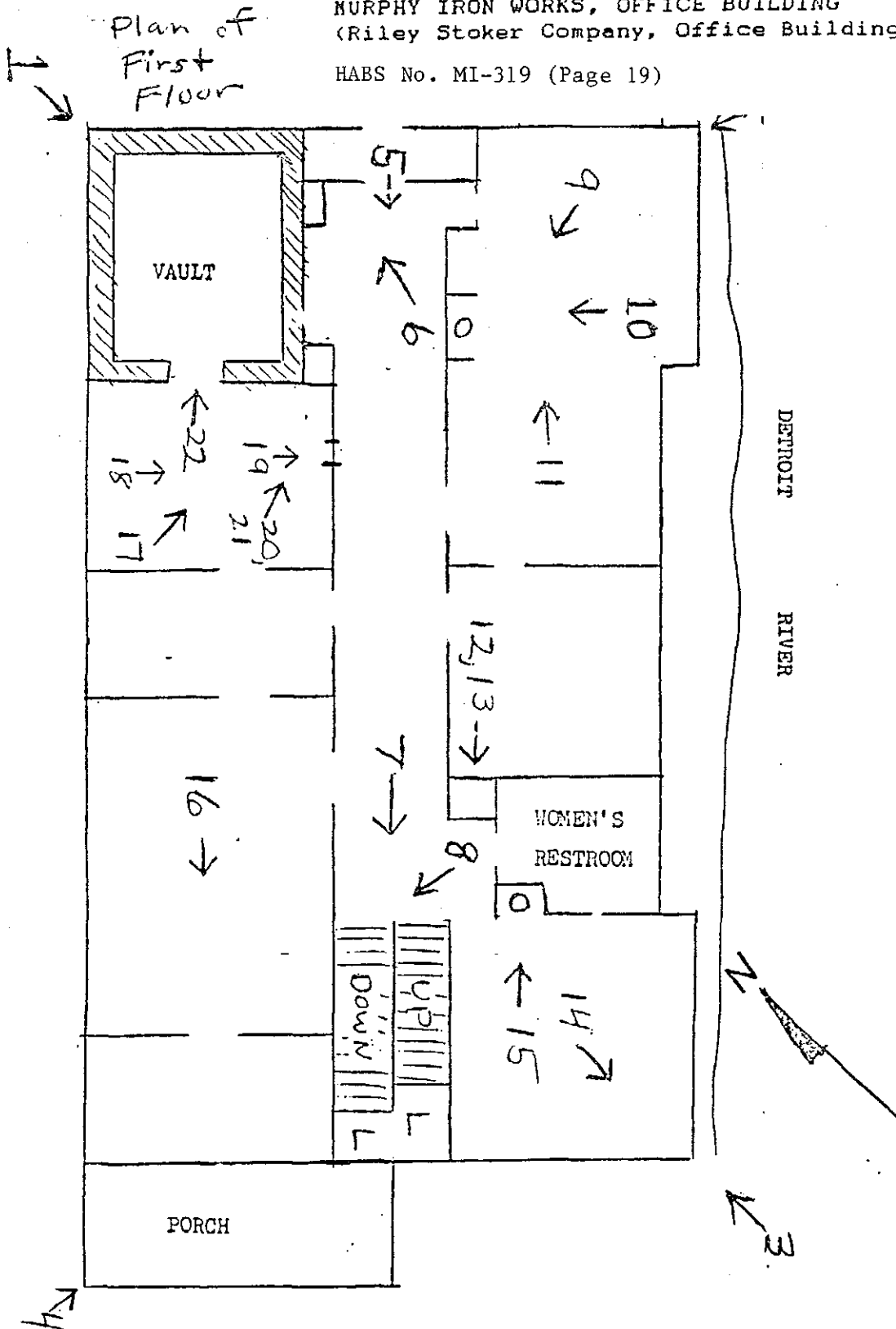
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ATTIC PLAN
(15 NOVEMBER 1988)



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PLAN OF SECOND FL.
(15 NOVEMBER 1988)

Hand-drawn floor plan of a building with numbered rooms and corridors. The plan includes a north arrow pointing towards the top right, labeled 'N'. The building is situated next to a 'DETROIT RIVER' on the right side. Rooms are numbered 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35. Corridors are labeled 'UP' and 'DOWN'. A long double-headed arrow on the left side indicates a length of '22'. The plan shows various door openings and wall structures.

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PLAN OF ATTIC
(15 NOVEMBER 1988)

